

Sermon, Dwelling in Dissonance, Complicity and Innocence

Advent 5, March 22, 2026

Good morning.

Has our Lenten Series "Dwelling in Dissonance" helped you identify dissonance in your life? Are you comfortable, relaxed or feeling at home with dissonance?

As I thought about dissonance as I prepared for today, I realized that I have often resisted "dwelling" in dissonance. I much prefer when things are clearly either right or wrong, when people are either good or evil.

Then I realized my either/or thinking had been challenged when I was in my twenties already.

Mannheim Mennonite Church, the church my family attended, was reeling after a divisive vote on renewing of our pastor's term. It resulted in hurt feelings and mistrust. We wondered if there was a way of making congregational decisions that didn't result in winners and losers. I don't recall how we connected to a Jesuit father, but what I do remember is that he shared about the discernment process the Jesuits used when making decisions. Did you notice I said "discernment process" when making decisions? When discerning God's will, he advised, "Always look at both the pros and cons of each option. Be open to changing your mind or letting go of your preferred option being the only "right one." When someone asked, "What if I can't see any negatives for an option?" his surprising reply was, "Then you aren't being open to the Spirit and should withdraw from the process as, every option has both positives and negatives."

Our congregation used this approach for a while. On the one hand, listening to each other's pros and cons was very time-consuming. On the other hand, when we were willing to take the time to do it, to pray, "thy will be done," as Jesus taught in the Lord's prayer, and to trust God to work in and through others as well as ourselves, it became easier to let go of our preferred option and not stand in the way of the group moving forward with another. The result was experiencing God at work in amazing ways!

Another experience that came to mind was dissonance in scripture and music. I was introduced to blue notes when I was a part of an intergenerational small group in our congregation. Singing scripture songs or choruses was a regular part of our meetings. Jan and Margaret Overduin, were a part of this group. I recall Jan, a very talented musician, talking about learning to appreciate the simple music of a lot of the songs we sang. When Margaret wrote music to accompany 2 Cor. 12:10,a

verse full of dissonance, she included what they said was blue notes or disharmony. Paul is saying to the struggling church in Corinth:

I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches and necessities
in persecution, in distress, for Christ's sake.

I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches and necessities
in persecution for my blessed Lord's sake.

For when I'm weak, then I am strong

when I'm weak, then I am strong

I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches and necessities
in persecution for my blessed Lord's sake.

It has been an ongoing challenge for me to live out the message of this verse - especially as I have aged. But I am finding when I take the time to look for God at work or look for things for which to be thankful, in the middle of the challenges I face, I am not disappointed.

Moving to today's scripture which is a continuation of the story we began last week of the trial of Jesus by Pilate. We stopped last week with Pilate telling the crowd that he finds no case against Jesus. Pilate offered to release Jesus as part of the custom to release someone at Passover. The crowd insisted he release Barabbas, a criminal, instead.

As I read John 19.1-16a, I invite you to imagine yourselves as part of a jury deciding which of the characters are complicit and which are innocent of the death of Jesus. At the end, I will suggest some points for you to keep in mind when reaching your verdict.

¹Then Pilate took Jesus and had him flogged. ²And the soldiers wove a crown of thorns and put it on his head, and they dressed him in a purple robe. ³They kept coming up to him, saying, "Hail, King of the Jews!" and striking him on the face. ⁴Pilate went out again and said to the crowd, "Look, I am bringing him out to you to let you know that I find no case against him." ⁵So Jesus came out, wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe. Pilate said to them, "Here is the man!" ⁶When the chief priests and the temple police saw him, they shouted, "Crucify him! Crucify him!" Pilate said to them "Take him yourselves and crucify him; I find no case against him." ⁷The crowd answered Pilate, "We have a law, and according to that law he ought to die because he has claimed to be the Son of God." ⁸Now when Pilate heard this, he was more afraid than ever. ⁹He entered his headquarters again and asked Jesus, "Where are you from?" But Jesus gave him no answer. ¹⁰Pilate therefore said to him, "Do you refuse to speak to me? Do you not know that I have power to release you, and power to

crucify you?' ¹¹ Jesus answered him, 'You would have no power over me unless it had been given you from above; therefore, the one who handed me over to you is guilty of a greater sin.' ¹² From then on Pilate tried to release him, but the crowd cried out, 'If you release this man, you are no friend of the emperor. Everyone who claims to be a king sets himself against the emperor.' ¹³ When Pilate heard these words, he brought Jesus outside and sat on the judge's bench at a place called The Stone Pavement, or in Hebrew Gabbatha. ¹⁴ Now it was the day of Preparation for the Passover; and it was about noon. Pilot said to the crowd, 'Here is your King!' ¹⁵ They cried out, 'Away with him! Away with him! Crucify him!' Pilate asked them, 'Shall I crucify your King?' The chief priests answered, 'We have no king but the emperor.' ¹⁶ Then Pilot handed Jesus over to them to be crucified.

So, which characters are innocent or complicit or both innocent and complicit in the death of Jesus?

Let's begin with the Roman soldiers. On the one hand, the soldiers were ordered by Pilot to flog Jesus. Does that mean they are innocent because they were following orders? On the other hand, they also put together a mock coronation. Does that make them complicit in the death of Jesus? If you think the soldiers are complicit raise your hand. If you think they are innocent, raise your hand. If you think they are both innocent & complicit raise your hand.

(Comment on results)

What about the Chief Priests? On the one hand, they were appointed by Rome to keep the Jewish people in line. In John 11 we are told that after the resurrection of Lazarus, many people who had seen what Jesus did, believed in him. The chief priests and other religious leaders were afraid that if this continued, there would be an uprising, and the Romans would come and destroy both their holy place and nation. Were the Chief Priests innocent of the death of Jesus because they too were just doing their job when they decided that it was better to have one man die for the people than to have the whole nation destroyed? Did the ends justify the means?

On the other hand, the priest's role was to lead the people in worship of the one true God. Were the chief priests complicit because they were more interested in maintaining their own power rather than being faithful leaders of their people? Were they complicit because they treated Jesus as a threat to their power rather than considering how he could be God's chosen servant? Were they complicit for saying "We have no king but the emperor" playing the political game with Pilot to get him to crucify Jesus or possibly be replaced by Rome for freeing a possible threat to the. If you think the chief priests were complicit in the death of Jesus raise your hand. If you think the chief priests were

innocent, raise your hand, If you think the chief priests were both complicit and innocent, raise your hand. (Comment on the results)

What about the crowd? Who do you think is in the crowd? Would it have been just people who saw Jesus as a threat to peace, using the excuse he was breaking one law while ignoring the law “thou shalt not kill? Would it have included followers of Jesus and others who had been waving palm branches and shouting ‘Hosanna’ a couple of days ago, but today too afraid to speak up today. Are the people in the crowd complicit for acting out of fear or frustration? Fear of speaking out or fear of Rome. Frustration because Jesus wasn’t acting the way they thought he should as their Messiah. If you think the crowd was complicit in the death of J. raise your hand. If you think the crowd was innocent, raise your hand. If you think the crowd was both complicit and innocent, raise your hand.

(comment on results)

And lastly, Pilot, the Roman governor, who was appointed to maintain order, manage taxes, and administer justice in the Jewish province. On the one hand, is he innocent as he was just doing his job? Three times, he says he finds no case against Jesus. He did try to set Jesus free. Does that make him innocent? On the other hand, is Pilot complicit because keeping his job seemed to be more important than killing an innocent man? If you think Pilot was complicit in the death of J. raise your hand. If you think Pilot was innocent of his death raise your hand. If you think Pilot was both innocent and complicit raise your hand. (Comment on results)

So, how do we apply our observations from this ancient story to our lives today? How has God been speaking to us through the different characters - the soldiers, the chief priests, the crowd and Pilot? I’ll pause to give you a little time to think before sharing some of my thoughts and hopefully others will share their thoughts during worship response time.

Looking at the actions of the soldiers challenges me to think about how I might be hurting others through my actions and words. I want to remember the most important commandment:

[Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength.](#)

[Love your neighbour as you love yourself.](#)

Looking at the actions of the Chief Priests and Religious leaders, challenges me to become more aware of when I am letting my choices be driven by my fears.

Looking at the actions of the crowd, challenges me to look at the motivation for my actions and inactions. Praying “Thy Kingdom come, thy will be done” may help me not assume my will and God’s will, are the same.

Looking at Pilot, I sense the invitation to hold fast to truth regardless of the pressure to ignore it.

From looking at this scripture, I have concluded that dwelling in dissonance is what I am called to do. As a follower of Jesus my Kingdom values will often clash with the values of the kingdoms of this world. I think looking at the pros and cons of clashing choices will help me discern which ones God is calling me to hold on to and which ones to let go of.

I will close with a prayer chant that has been helpful to me when I’m struggling with letting go of something.

Let go. Let go. Let go some more. Let go of everything, God is love.